

Year One: Hexton Hall for Witches and Wizards

by Lady Dawson

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Summary: Anna and Jesse Dawson have known only two things in their life: that they can only depend on each other and they are different from other kids. Now they have been invited to a school filled with magic, but along the way, they will learn secrets in their past as well as the truth about where they came from. A secret that is even stranger than they realize.

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Chapter One: An Invitation

It was a quiet day in the small town of Briarwood; no one would have expected anything odd to be happening at all, for it seemed to be a morning just like any other, in that hot sticky day in the midst of July. So hot, was it, that most of the town's inhabitants had partaken their activities out of doors, so many of the children were either at the pool or playing sports with their friends, their parents watching silently over them.

For most of them, anyway; however, at the local orphanage, there was only the caretaker Mrs. Finch, an older woman with frizzy red hair and a sharp eye. She was known around the orphanage for having eyes in the back of her head, so when the black car rolled around the corner, she was surprised at not having known someone was coming.

Rather than reveal that to her charges, however—"them believing that she knew everything sometimes came in handy"—Mrs. Finch just had one of the older boys keep a watch over everything while she walked to

the driveway, approaching the black car.

The driver was clamoring out, but rather than address Mrs. Finch, he hurried to the backseat, opening the door and a woman climbed out.

To say that this woman was strange would have been an understatement; she had raven dark hair that was cut short that shined when the light touched it and grey eyes that seemed to radiate power and authority, but it was her clothes that clashed with that perspective, Mrs. Finch thought.

She wore baggy pants that looked like something out of the '70's and a blouse that didn't match at all, plus a sweater that was out of place, considering that it was a million degrees out. Briefly, she wondered if this was some kind of new fashion but this woman, though younger than she was, was hardly a youngster.

Rather than touch of the subject of her clothes--after all, if that's what she wanted to wear, that was her business--Mrs. Finch walked towards her.

"May I help you?"

Removing her daffodil shaped sunglasses, the woman gave her a smile that instinctively made Mrs. Finch suspicious.

"Madeline Finch, I presume?" she questioned and surprised, she nodded without even thinking about it. "My name is Regina Blanchard; I was wondering if we could speak for a moment about two of your charges."

Immediately, all suspicion fell away and Mrs. Finch beamed without even thinking about it. "I see, you're looking to adopt?"

Ms. Blanchard chuckled, her teeth very even and white as she shook her head. "I'm afraid not; motherhood was never something that appealed to me. I take care of enough children as it is. Something, I suspect, that you and I have in common?" she inquired, grey eyes traveling to the yard.

"You don't know the half of it. So, if you're not interested in adopting, then why are you here?"

"Is there someplace private we could talk? Perhaps with an iced tea? It is rather hot out," Ms. Blanchard remarked, fanning herself.

Wondering why she didn't just remove the sweater, Mrs. Finch nodded, beckoning her into the house while the driver remained by the car.

After fixing them both up with a glass of iced tea, she showed the younger woman into her office, where Ms. Blanchard looked around with some interest at some of the things that no normal person would find interesting, such as the light fixtures and the plumbing and even the electricity outlets. Mrs. Finch was starting to find this woman just a little bit more than odd and was even wondering if she was quite right.

"Now, what is all this about?" she asked, keeping her opinions to herself until she found out what was going on. "You mentioned you were here about a couple of the kids?"

"Yes, I am," Ms. Blanchard agreed, finally turning to look at her. "There's a brother and sister that live here, I believe? Anna and Jesse Dawson, unless I'm mistaken?"

Mrs. Finch raised her eyebrows before glancing briefly out the window; she could see the twins from where she was sitting, in the treehouse by themselves like they normally were, watching the others play or else playing on their own, but they mostly kept to themselves.

Not that she could really blame them; the two were strange and had oddities happen around them, things that nobody had been able to explain, and there was that thing that they could do, almost as though they knew what the other was thinking without ever saying a word aloud.

Well, it was no wonder they shied away from the other kids. Or rather, the other kids shied away from them, but whatever the case, the twins were usually on their own.

"What about them?" she asked, redirecting her attention to Ms. Blanchard, who had a slight smile on her face, almost like she knew what Mrs. Finch was thinking. A preposterous idea, but it made Mrs. Finch nervous all the same.

"I understand that the two of them have no family; they were found ten years ago, abandoned, and were immediately deposited into this . . . facility?" Ms. Blanchard inquired.

"Yes, that's correct."

Ms. Blanchard hmmed as she sat across from Mrs. Finch. "And have there been any occurrences with either of them?" she wanted to know. "Perhaps something has happened whenever they get angry or perhaps scared? I understand there was an incident with one of their foster parents . . . ?"

"Yeah, that was a doozy," Mrs. Finch muttered, remembering all too well the incident in question. "Moira Harrison never could make much sense about what happened there, poor lady, but she claimed that they were making dolls danceâ€"without any string," she added, sipping her tea. "And that the boy was able to jump off a two story building and landed right on his feet, as if that were even possible. Sure, the boy's a tough cookie, but no one can land from that distance, except maybe a cat. Now the girl is even worse," she said dryly. "Things always seem to fly off the shelves whenever she's upset and the lights have been known to flicker when it ain't even storming. It's no wonder poor Moira ended up in the psych ward," she said with a shake of her head.

Though her eyes narrowed slightly, Ms. Blanchard observed, "Fascinating."

Snorting, Mrs. Finch said, "That's one word for it, I guess. Either way, those two are an oddity and that's being nice; the boy's a born troublemaker and has gotten into more fights here than the rest of

the boys put together. If it weren't for his sister keeping things from getting rough, I would've gotten rid of him long time ago."

"And I might be able to help you with that."

Mrs. Finch frowned. "How's that now?"

With a smile, Ms. Blanchard stood up, sipping her tea. "It just so happens that I happen to be the dean of a very exclusive, very exceptional private school, Mrs. Finch; not many outside of alumni are accepted into our halls. But we have been looking at the twins for quite some time," she informed her, "and we are prepared to offer them scholarships, starting this fall."

Whatever she expected her to say, it wasn't that; indeed, Mrs. Finch goggled at the younger woman for a full minute, half expecting her to start laughing and say that she was joking, but Ms. Blanchard looked very serious as she regarded her, with no hint of laughter in her eyes.

"I see," she finally managed to say. "I was . . . not informed that they had applied for such a . . . scholarship."

"My dear Mrs. Finch," Ms. Blanchard said with a smile, "no one applies. Hexton Hall extends an invitation to those who . . . qualify. As I said, most of our students are the children of our alumni; usually, we only have three or four that are new students at our fine school, but including the twins, we will have a grand total of fiveâ€"which is the largest number that we've had since we started opening our doors to new students. The school board was quite impressed to hear that, I'll have you know."

"How very fortunate," Mrs. Finch muttered. "And where is this school, exactly? Would you have a bus to pick them every day orâ€"

"Goodness, no," Ms. Blanchard said with a laugh. "On the contrary, it happens to be a boarding school. Our students live there throughout the school year, except during summer break and during the winter holidays."

Mrs. Finch perked up at that; a boarding school? That meant that that troublesome boy wouldn't be around for most of the yearâ€"and maybe she could convince this school to take him the entire year. And though his sister wasn't as much of a nuisance as he was, she had to admit that the girl was a little . . . eerie.

"Perhaps we could bring the twins inside and I could discuss this with them?" Ms. Blanchard suggested, her hand moving slightly and suddenly, Mrs. Finch felt a wave of confusion pass through her.

"Yes . . ." she said faintly, not even thinking twice about it. "Yes . . . perhaps that's a good idea." She set down her tea and walked over to the window, pushing it open and immediately, sounds of children playing met their ears. "Jesse Dawson! Anna Dawson! Both of you get in here!"

* * *

><p>Glancing up briefly as she heard Mrs. Finch yelling for her and her brother, Anna Dawson glanced sideways at her twin.</p>

"What did you do now?"

It wasn't that crazy of a question; Jesse was known for being a troublemaker around the orphanage, getting into more fights than the rest of the boys put togetherâ€"though, really, not all of the fights were orchestrated by him and the ones that he had started were usually because the boys were bullying her.

Jesse shrugged as he jumped down from the tree that he was lounging at, reaching up to help her down as she climbed down gracefully.

"Nothing I know about, but that wouldn't stop Alec from pinning anything on me."

That was probably true, she reasoned; Alec Larson was a few years older than they were, but was the bully around the orphanage, often sending the other kids away in tears after he'd been picking on them or else taking what little belongings that they might have. Not that he ever got reprimanded for anything; no matter what else he might be, Alec was a favorite of Mrs. Finch's, so he was safe from any reproaching. The only reason why she and Jesse weren't on the receiving end of his bullying was because he was scared of them ever since that time that a branch had fallen on him when he was terrorizing the twins and he ended up with a concussion. The branch in question didn't show any signs of breaking up until that point and ever since then, he was skittish around them.

And it wasn't the only time that odd things had happened around them, Anna thought. Strange things seemed to happen around them, things that neither she nor Jesse had ever been able to explain or even understand how they happened, but it was always when either of them had been angry or scared.

On more than one occasion, she'd heard the kids whisper to each other that she and Jesse were witches.

"Besides," Jesse added as she jumped the last few feet onto the ground, "if it was me that was in trouble, why would she call for you?"

"Good point," she agreed as she fell into step next to them, making their way up to the house, ducking underneath the kickball that was kicked in their direction. "So why do you think she's calling for us?"

But Jesse was already looking at the driveway, at the car that had pulled up here earlier; there was a man still sitting in the car, obviously waiting for someone, but the weird lady that had gotten out was still missing. They'd seen a glimpse of her from their spot in the tree, but were too far away to see her properly.

Glancing sideways at her, Jesse asked, "You think it might have something to do with that lady? She couldn't have placed us, could she?"

It was possible but doubtful; it was hard enough to get foster homes

for kids their age, let alone the two of them together. Half the reason why they were in a group home was because no one wanted twins that had odd things happen around them and were closer than seemed appropriate, as Mrs. Finch had put it once.

Then again, she hated having Jesse in the house, saying that the problems in the house would go downhill if she could find somewhere to put him. She would probably be happy to get them a placement anywhere.

"Guess we'd better go find out," she said, a chill running down her spine. She always seemed to get weird feelings, sometimes that ended up coming true, and though she was slightly wary, she also couldn't help but have a feeling about this, like something was about to happen.

Though for good or for bad remained to be seen.

Moving through the house behind her brother, Anna saw the strange lady standing in Mrs. Finch's office with the caretaker, who was looking slightly odd even as Jesse knocked on the door, pushing open the door.

"You wanted to see us?"

"Yes, I did," Mrs. Finch said, sounding a far cry from her usual self. "Or rather our guest wished to speak with you. This is Dean Regina Blanchard from . . ." She paused, looking confused. "I'm sorry, which school did you say you were from?"

"I doubt that you've ever heard of it, Mrs. Finch," the weird lady said, her smile almost condescending. "As I said, it's very exclusive and not many outside of our alumni have even heard of it."

Although her clothes were strange and a couple decades out of place, Anna thought that there was something about her that radiated power; she could have been a queen, from the way that she drew power around her like a cloak. And she held it in such a way that she was sure this wasn't someone she wanted to cross.

So of course, Jesse said rudely, "So what do you want with us?"

Ms. Blanchard raised her eyebrows slightly but Mrs. Finch, who on a normal day would have him doing chores around the house for talking disrespectfully to a guest, just continued to look out of it, almost like she had a drink too many.

Rather than comment on his rudeness, however, Ms. Blanchard just turned to the caretaker with that same condescending smile.

"Perhaps I could speak to the children myself? Would that be all right with you two?"

Anna exchanged a look with Jesse, who bristled upon being referred to as a child, but rather than say anything, she just opened up the link in her mind that she shared with her brother.

They had never really known when they had first been able to do this; truthfully, Anna couldn't remember a time when they hadn't been able to, but she did remember when they figured out that the way that they

could talk to each other, without using words, wasn't something that most people could do or even understand; one of the many reasons why they kept it to themselves.

Using the link, she asked soundlessly, _ "What do you think?" _

_ "I think we'd better figure out what's going on," _ he replied through the link, his mind-voice sounding just as uneasy as she felt.

"All right then," Mrs. Finch said, standing up very quickly before either of the twins could give their verbal consent, heading out of the office. "I should go check on the kids anyway; can't leave them alone too long, all hell will break loose."

"Mrs. Finchâ€" "

But it was too late; the caretaker had already gone.

Looking back at Ms. Blanchard, Anna was again struck by the feeling that something was about to happen as her condescending smile faded, replaced by a true one as she surveyed the twins.

"Nowâ€" "

"What happened to Mrs. Finch?" Anna asked recklessly. Normally, she was the quieter one but whatever was going on with Mrs. Finch, she suspected the lady was involved.

"Don't worry about her," Ms. Blanchard reassured her, "it was just a simple Confundous Charm so she would leave us to talk, nothing that you need to be concerned about. She'll be back to her usual . . . charming self in an hour or so." Anna shot a confused look at her brother, who was frowning. "Shall we sit?"

"Confundous Charm?" Jesse asked suspiciously.

Ms. Blanchard smiled mysteriously as she withdrew a slender piece of wood from underneath her sweater. "It is quite warm in here, isn't it?" she asked and with a quick movement, both twins had a cup of iced tea in their hands and there was a cool breeze coming from somewhere, but that wasn't right; the air conditioner had broken last week and no one had fixed it yet. "And those chairs don't look very comfortable, wouldn't you say?"

Another movement and the wooden chairs in front of the desk were replaced by plump, comfy armchairs and Mrs. Finch's chair was replaced by a tall armchair that looked just as comfortable if not more so.

Sinking down into the tall one, Ms. Blanchard gestured for them to sit down.

Unable to believe what she was seeing, Anna slowly did as she was told, with her brother following suit.

"How did you do that?" Jesse asked slowly, disbelief rippling through the linkâ€"or maybe her own was so strong that it felt like it was coming from him, Anna reasoned. Or maybe it was just that it was coming from both of them.

Yes, that last one was more reasonable.

"Why, with magic, of course," Ms. Blanchard replied, smiling a much different smile than she had used on Mrs. Finch. "You two didn't think that you were the only ones in the world that could do such wonders, did you?"

Anna swallowed. "I'm not sure what you mean."

"My dear girl, shall we have an agreement not to lie to one another?" Ms. Blanchard looked at her sharply. "I am already well aware of the odd occurrences that have happened around the two of you; things flying off the walls, leaping off buildings . . . any of this ringing any bells?" she asked, looking at the two of them. "Not to mention that dancing doll incident with Moira Harrison . . . don't worry, she has already been dealt with. Her memory has been modified and she won't remember anything that happened while you were staying with her, though from my conversation with Mrs. Finch, she had been talking long enough before we got to her. I'll have to inform a few people about this," she added thoughtfully.

"How do you know about that?" Anna asked quietly, not daring to look at her brother, torn between fear and curiosity.

This woman seemed to know about things that she shouldn't—"things that she couldn't"—but she wasn't acting like there was anything wrong with them, like the few people that had noticed things about them.

"It's my job, Miss Dawson," Ms. Blanchard replied, giving her a kind smile. "My name is Regina Blanchard, as Mrs. Finch told you, but what she didn't tell you, simply because she didn't know, was that I am the Dean of Hexton Hall for Witches and Wizards."

For a moment, neither twin spoke—"either aloud or in their minds"—or blinked or even as much as looked at each other. Anna was too stunned to actually say anything and she could feel disbelief rippling through the link.

"Give us a clue as to whether you're kidding or not?" he finally said.

"I am not kidding," she replied, though she looked highly amused. "As I'm sure you two are already aware, magic is not just something that is born of Muggle imagination."

Anna shook her head, trying to clear the web of thoughts coursing through her mind. "What's a Muggle?"

Ms. Blanchard blinked, then chuckled. "Forgive me, it has been a while since I have visited any Muggle-raised; a Muggle is what we call someone that is non-magic." She tilted her head to them.

"Obviously, you have figured out that I am a like you and can do the same things you can. I am a witch, just like you two are a witch and wizard, and I am here to extend scholarships to both of you to Hexton Hall, if you would . . . wish to come." The pause between the two words spoke volumes about her doubts that they would want to stay at the orphanage. "If you would like to ask questions, now would be the time."

Anna stared at her, and then at her brother, who wore an identical expression of utter disbelief, then back to the dean.

Hardly surprising, it was Jesse who managed to find her voice first.

"Hold on a minute, you're telling me that there's an entire school for magic? And there are more people who can . . . do what we can do?"

"Yes, of course there is, Mr. Dawson. Surely you two didn't think you were the only ones? No, there is an entire world filled with magic, which you were born into and now that you've turned eleven, it is time for you to attend our institution, so you can learn how to use these gifts you were born with."

"Born in?" Anna spoke and both her brother and the dean looked at her. She swallowed before plunging on, "Does that mean . . . do you mean that our parents . . . does that mean that they were . . . ?"

Ms. Blanchard's eyes softened in understanding and Jesse looked torn between desire and uncertainty.

"I'm sorry, but I don't know," she admitted, looking very apologetic. "Yes, it's very possible that your mother and father were a witch and wizardâ€"though more likely that it was just one of them, seeing as you were raised in the Muggle world. But on the other hand, you could very well be Muggle-born; there are witches and wizards that are born into entirely Muggle families. It's not usual for both twins to have magic, if that's the case. If you wish to find out, there are ways of doing that, but I'm afraid you would have to be of legal age, seventeen."

Anna frowned. "Um . . . the legal age is eighteen."

"Not in the wizarding world," Ms. Blanchard told her. "Seventeen is the legal age, which is when you will be allowed to do magic outside of school. I know you've done magic before now, but once you begin your magical education, you are not allowed to do any outside of school except in dire situations and never in front of Muggles. Statue of Secrecy, you know," she said offhandedly.

Though she didn't know specifically, Anna did get the gist of what she was saying.

"Now, Hexton is a boarding school, so you will spend both semesters there, but during summer and winter breaks, you will have to return here. Some students do remain at school during the holidays, if you prefer," Ms. Blanchard told them. "If you do decide to go, the scholarship will include all required books and equipment, as well as your uniform." She smiled slightly. "Yes, I said the bad word, uniform. Should you decide to attend, a chaperone will be sent to you in several weeks, so you can get your school supplies." Ms. Blanchard leaned forward. "I know that this is a lot to take in, but I promise this is a very . . . well, magical place, for lack of a better term." She stood up. "I'm sure that you two have a lot to discuss, so if you'd like a little time . . . ?"

Glancing briefly at her brother, Anna asked quietly, "If we could just have a minute?"

"Of course," Ms. Blanchard said with a smile, inclining for them to go and talk with each other. "I'll be here when you're ready."

Slipping out of the armchair, Anna yanked on Jesse's arm to tug him out of the chair before leaving the office, moving through the house until they reached upstairs. Here, with everyone outside, it would be safe to talk.

"What do you think?"

"I don't know," Anna confessed, turning to her twin. His blue eyes, identical to hers, were filled with uncertainty but mixed with yearning. "It sounds crazy, but when has anything that happened to us ever made sense?"

Jesse actually cracked a grin at that. "True," he acknowledged. "So . . . do you want to go to this . . . school?"

Anna considered; truth be told, even without the whole magic thing, going to a different school and starting somewhere fresh sounded wonderful to her. And with the chance to learn how to use their . . . magicâ€"it felt so strange to hear that word, yet at the same time so exhilaratingâ€"it sounded even more amazing.

"I don't know about you, brother," she admitted, turning to face him, "but I don't want to pass this up. I want to go."

Jesse was already grinning. "So do I," he agreed. "But what about this dean? She seems a little . . ."

"Condescending?" Anna guessed.

"Yes, exactly."

Anna nodded. "I'm not so sure that it's that she is, though; I think it's that . . . Muggles seem just as strange to her as her world seems to us."

"I guess . . . so, I guess we've decided?"

"Definitely," Anna agreed. "Besides, it's not like you can go off on your own; you get in enough trouble as it is."

Her brother laughed, his arm falling around her shoulders as they made their way back downstairs where the dean was waiting patiently for them, her gaze flickering across the books that were aligned in Mrs. Finch's office. She looked up as soon as they reentered, a blooming smile on her face.

"I take it you've decided then?"

"Yes, we have," Anna agreed, looking at her. "Dean Blanchard, we would love to attend your school."

Ms. Blanchard smiled, standing up. "Wonderful," she declared. "All right, then, I should probably give you both these . . ." She opened

her briefcase, pulling out two copies of a book, handing them to each twin. Anna looked down at her copy of *An Introduction to the Wizarding World*. "You should probably read that before coming to school. Now, the semester begins on September 1st, but I will send a chaperone for you in a few weeks, so you can go to Dragon's Hold and get your school supplies. Oh, and if you would like to get a familiar, it is not included with the scholarship, but it is certainly not against protocol."

"Familiars?" Anna echoed. "You mean a pet?"

"Yes, certainly, Miss Dawson," Ms. Blanchard told her. "Most students get them during their first trip to Dragon's Hold. Now, I'm afraid I must leave you, but I will send a chaperone to escort you to get your supplies on . . ." She considered. "August 1st, will that work? Good," she declared. "I'm looking forward to seeing you. Have a wonderful summer," she added, moving to the door but paused on the way out. "Oh . . . I suppose I should change it back, shouldn't I?"

With a wave of her stick—no, wand, Anna thought—the furniture returned to normal and then Blanchard was gone.

AN: So here I am with a new story! Hope you enjoyed and please review!

End
file.